Defending the Legacy of Ivan Ilyin: The Moral Imperative of Force and the Philosophical Foundations of Russian Statecraft

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Ivan Ilyin, a prominent Russian philosopher, has emerged as a central figure in understanding the moral and philosophical underpinnings of contemporary Russian statecraft. His work, particularly *On Resistance to Evil by Force*, argues that in the face of evil, the use of force is not only justifiable but morally obligatory. Ilyin's philosophy, deeply rooted in Orthodox Christian tradition and the historical challenges faced by Russia, provides a compelling framework for defending the state, maintaining order, and upholding justice. This paper explores Ilyin's influence on modern Russian governance, especially under Vladimir Putin, who has drawn upon Ilyin's ideas to shape policies that prioritize national sovereignty, security, and the preservation of traditional values. By examining the moral imperatives articulated by Ilyin and their relevance in today's geopolitical context, this paper seeks to illuminate the philosophical foundations that continue to guide Russia's approach to both domestic and international challenges.

Keywords: Ivan Ilyin, Russian statecraft, moral imperative, use of force, Orthodox Christian philosophy, Vladimir Putin, national sovereignty, traditional values, geopolitical strategy, Russian philosophy, governance.

Introduction

Ivan Ilyin: A Philosopher of Enduring Influence

Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin stands as one of the most significant Russian philosophers of the 20th century, whose works have transcended his era to influence modern political thought in Russia. Born in 1883, Ilyin lived through a period of intense political upheaval, witnessing the fall of the Russian Empire, the rise of Bolshevism, and the ensuing civil war that tore the nation apart. His experiences during this turbulent time profoundly shaped his philosophical outlook, particularly his views on the nature of evil, the role of the state, and the moral obligations of individuals within society.

Ilyin's works, largely composed in exile following the Bolshevik Revolution, reflect a deep commitment to the preservation of Russian cultural and spiritual identity. His philosophical contributions, especially his treatises on law, the state, and the use of force, have become cornerstones of contemporary Russian political discourse. Ilyin’s influence is particularly evident in the policies and rhetoric of Vladimir Putin, who has openly cited Ilyin as a key intellectual influence, thereby cementing Ilyin's status as a guiding figure in the ideological framework of modern Russia.

Central Thesis: The Moral Necessity of Force

The core argument of this paper is a robust defense of Ilyin's views on the moral necessity of force in the face of evil. In his seminal work, "On Resistance to Evil by Force," Ilyin challenges the pacifist doctrines of his time, particularly those espoused by Leo Tolstoy, arguing that there are situations where the use of force is not only justified but morally required. According to Ilyin, when faced with evil that cannot be contained by any other means, it becomes a "knightly duty" to oppose it forcefully. This perspective is deeply rooted in the Orthodox Christian tradition, which Ilyin saw as a moral compass guiding the actions of individuals and the state alike.

The alignment of Ilyin's philosophy with the policies of Vladimir Putin is particularly striking. Under Putin’s leadership, Russia has adopted a stance that emphasizes the protection of national sovereignty, the preservation of traditional values, and the use of decisive action in the face of perceived threats, both

internal and external. This approach mirrors Ilyin's insistence on the moral imperative of forceful resistance to evil, suggesting that Putin's policies are not merely pragmatic but are grounded in a philosophical tradition that sees force as a necessary tool for safeguarding the nation's moral and spiritual integrity.

Statement of Purpose: Exploring Ilyin's Philosophical Framework

This paper seeks to explore how Ilyin's philosophy provides a robust framework for understanding the use of force as a moral and necessary component of governance and defense. By delving into Ilyin's arguments and examining their contemporary relevance, the paper will demonstrate that Ilyin's views offer a compelling justification for the actions taken by modern states, particularly Russia, in the face of existential threats.

The exploration will encompass an analysis of Ilyin's key works, a discussion of how these ideas have been adopted and adapted by Vladimir Putin, and a response to the criticisms leveled against both Ilyin and Putin by Western liberal commentators. Ultimately, the paper will argue that Ilyin's philosophy not only remains relevant in today's geopolitical landscape but also serves as a vital moral guide for those tasked with the defense of their nation and the preservation of its values. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the moral complexities involved in the use of force and to advocate for the continued relevance of Ilyin's ideas in shaping the policies of the Russian state.

The Historical Context of Ilyin's Philosophy

Background on the Political and Social Turmoil in Russia

Ivan Ilyin's philosophy was deeply influenced by the extraordinary political and social upheavals that characterized Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Born in 1883, Ilyin came of age during a time when the Russian Empire was grappling with profound internal challenges, including widespread social unrest, economic difficulties, and the increasing radicalization of political movements. The early 20th century was marked by the 1905 Revolution, a wave of strikes, protests, and violent confrontations that exposed the deep fissures

within Russian society. Although this revolution was ultimately quashed, it foreshadowed the more devastating upheavals to come.

The First World War further exacerbated these tensions, leading to severe economic strain, mass casualties, and a growing disillusionment with the Tsarist regime. The February Revolution of 1917 resulted in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, ending centuries of Romanov rule and leading to the establishment of a provisional government. However, this government was short-lived, as the October Revolution later that year brought the Bolsheviks to power under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin.

The Bolshevik seizure of power plunged Russia into a brutal civil war between the Red Army, loyal to the Bolshevik government, and the White Army, comprising various anti-Bolshevik forces, including monarchists, liberals, and other opponents of the new regime. Ilyin, who initially supported the White movement, witnessed firsthand the chaos, violence, and moral disintegration that accompanied the collapse of the Russian Empire. The eventual victory of the Bolsheviks in 1922 forced Ilyin into exile, where he continued to develop his philosophical ideas in response to the catastrophic events he had experienced.

Examination of the Pacifist Movement Led by Leo Tolstoy

During this period of upheaval, one of the most prominent voices advocating for a radically different approach to dealing with conflict and violence was the celebrated Russian novelist and thinker Leo Tolstoy. Tolstoy, who by the end of his life had embraced a form of Christian anarchism, vehemently opposed all forms of violence and coercion. His philosophy of nonviolence was rooted in his interpretation of the teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly the Sermon on the Mount, which Tolstoy understood as a call for absolute pacifism. He argued that true Christians must reject the use of force in all circumstances, advocating instead for passive resistance, love for enemies, and the turning of the other cheek.

Tolstoy’s pacifism resonated with many, particularly in a society ravaged by war and oppression. His ideas inspired movements both in Russia and abroad, influencing figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. However, Tolstoy's rejection of violence as a means of opposing evil also attracted

significant criticism, especially from those who believed that some evils were so profound that they could not be combated by nonviolent means alone.

Ilyin was among the critics of Tolstoy's pacifism. He believed that Tolstoy's doctrine, while noble in its intent, was dangerously naive and unsuited to the harsh realities of political and social life. In Ilyin's view, there were circumstances where evil could only be restrained or defeated through the use of force. He saw the pacifist approach as an abdication of responsibility, arguing that it left society defenseless against those who would exploit or destroy it. For Ilyin, the use of force was not an act of aggression but a moral duty when confronting evil that could not be otherwise contained.

The Orthodox Tradition of Physical Opposition to Evil

Ilyin's rejection of Tolstoy's pacifism was deeply informed by the Orthodox Christian tradition, which played a central role in shaping his worldview. Unlike Tolstoy's interpretation of Christianity, which emphasized pacifism and nonresistance, the Orthodox tradition maintained that there were circumstances in which the use of force was not only permissible but necessary. This tradition, deeply rooted in the history and theology of the Orthodox Church, upheld the idea that Christians had a duty to defend their faith, their community, and their nation against evil.

Orthodox Christianity does not advocate for violence or war lightly; it recognizes the tragic consequences of conflict. However, it also acknowledges that in a fallen world, where evil exists and seeks to harm the innocent, force may be required to protect what is good and just. This view is reflected in the concept of "Just War" (a notion also found in other Christian traditions), which holds that war can be morally justified under certain conditions, particularly when it is waged to defend against aggression or to protect the innocent.

Ilyin drew upon this tradition to argue that the use of force, when employed to resist evil, could be a righteous act. He saw the state as having a divinely ordained role in maintaining order and justice, which sometimes necessitated the use of force. For Ilyin, the failure to use force when confronted with grave evil was not a sign of moral superiority but of moral cowardice. He believed that individuals and nations had a "knightly duty" to resist evil, even at great personal or collective

cost, and that this resistance was a moral obligation rooted in the very fabric of Christian ethics.

This Orthodox understanding of the moral use of force profoundly influenced Ilyin's thought and set him apart from the pacifist tradition represented by Tolstoy. It provided the foundation for his arguments in "On Resistance to Evil by Force," where he contends that the use of force, when necessary to combat evil, is not only justified but morally imperative. Ilyin's philosophy thus stands as a powerful defense of the moral necessity of force, a defense that has resonated strongly within Russian political thought, particularly in the context of modern Russia's challenges on the global stage.

The Central Argument of "On Resistance to Evil by Force"

Detailed Analysis of Ilyin's Argument: The Moral Necessity of Force

In his seminal work, *On Resistance to Evil by Force*, Ivan Ilyin presents a compelling and intricate argument for the moral necessity of using force in certain circumstances. At the heart of Ilyin's philosophy is the recognition that evil is an active and pervasive force in the world, one that cannot always be countered through passive resistance or moral persuasion alone. While acknowledging the ideal of peace and the moral worth of nonviolence, Ilyin insists that there are situations in which the use of force is not only permissible but obligatory.

Ilyin's argument begins with a stark observation of the nature of evil: it is not a passive or abstract concept but an aggressive and destructive force that seeks to undermine good, disrupt social order, and harm the innocent. In this context, Ilyin rejects the pacifist doctrine, particularly the ideas put forth by Tolstoy, which advocate for unconditional nonviolence. For Ilyin, such a stance is naive and ultimately dangerous, as it leaves society defenseless against those who would commit acts of evil with impunity.

According to Ilyin, when evil manifests in such a way that it threatens the foundational principles of justice, order, and the well-being of the community, force becomes a necessary tool for its containment or eradication. He argues that there are certain evils—such as tyranny, oppression, and violent aggression—that cannot be met with passive resistance without resulting in the triumph of those

evils. In these cases, the use of force is not an expression of cruelty or a descent into barbarism, but rather a moral duty to protect the greater good.

Ilyin further argues that this necessity is not just a matter of practical survival but is deeply rooted in moral and ethical principles. To allow evil to go unchecked, simply for the sake of avoiding conflict, is to abdicate one's moral responsibility. Thus, Ilyin's philosophy does not merely justify the use of force; it elevates it to the level of a moral imperative under specific circumstances. The preservation of justice, the protection of the innocent, and the defense of the social and moral order all require that force be used when no other means will suffice.

The Concept of "Knightly Duty" and Its Implications for Moral Courage

Central to Ilyin's argument is the concept of "knightly duty," a term that he uses to encapsulate the moral responsibility of individuals and the state to confront and resist evil. This concept is deeply influenced by the chivalric traditions of medieval Europe, which idealized the figure of the knight as a protector of the weak, a defender of justice, and a warrior against evil. For Ilyin, this metaphor of the knight serves as a powerful symbol of the ethical obligation to take up arms when faced with malevolent forces that threaten the common good.

The idea of "knightly duty" implies a sense of moral courage that goes beyond mere physical bravery. It requires individuals to recognize the presence of evil and to be willing to confront it, even at great personal risk. This duty is not motivated by a desire for power, revenge, or personal gain, but by a selfless commitment to protecting others and upholding justice. In this sense, "knightly duty" is both a moral and spiritual calling, one that demands a deep sense of responsibility and an unwavering dedication to doing what is right, regardless of the cost.

Ilyin's notion of moral courage also encompasses the psychological and emotional challenges associated with the use of force. He acknowledges that engaging in violence, even in the service of a just cause, is a heavy burden to bear. It requires not only physical valor but also a profound inner strength to carry out actions that may be necessary but are nonetheless difficult and fraught with moral complexity. The true test of "knightly duty" lies in the ability to act decisively and righteously in the face of evil, while also bearing the moral weight of those actions with integrity and honor.

The Moral Burden and Ethical Justification of Force

One of the most distinctive aspects of Ilyin's philosophy is his recognition of the moral burden associated with the use of force. Unlike some thinkers who might glorify violence as a means to an end, Ilyin is acutely aware of the ethical dilemmas that arise when force is employed. He understands that even when force is used for just purposes, it can lead to suffering, destruction, and loss, and that these consequences must be weighed carefully against the potential benefits.

Ilyin does not take the decision to use force lightly, and he emphasizes that it must always be guided by a strong moral compass. The ethical justification for force, in Ilyin's view, hinges on the principle of proportionality and the necessity of the action. Force should only be used when it is the last resort—when all other options have been exhausted, and when the evil being confronted poses a clear and present danger to the well-being of individuals or society as a whole.

Moreover, Ilyin insists that the use of force must be carried out with a sense of moral responsibility and accountability. Those who wield force must do so with a clear understanding of the ethical implications of their actions, and they must be prepared to answer for the consequences. This moral burden is part of the "knightly duty" that Ilyin describes; it is the heavy responsibility of those who are called to defend justice and protect the innocent.

In providing an ethical justification for the use of force, Ilyin draws upon both Orthodox Christian teachings and broader philosophical traditions. He argues that force, when used rightly, is not only a necessary tool for preserving order and justice but also a manifestation of moral courage and ethical integrity. It is a difficult path, one fraught with challenges and potential pitfalls, but for Ilyin, it is an essential aspect of the human condition and a fundamental duty of those who seek to live justly in an unjust world.

Ilyin's philosophy, therefore, offers a nuanced and deeply considered approach to the moral issues surrounding the use of force. He acknowledges the complexities and potential dangers but ultimately affirms that in certain situations, force is not just a practical necessity but a profound moral obligation. This understanding of the moral burden and the ethical justification of force has had a lasting impact on

Russian political thought and continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of justice, security, and the role of the state in defending against evil.

Contemporary Relevance: Ilyin and Putin

Overview of Vladimir Putin's References to Ilyin and the Influence of Ilyin's Ideas on Modern Russian Policy

In recent years, Ivan Ilyin's philosophical legacy has found renewed relevance in the political discourse of modern Russia, particularly under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Putin, who has served as Russia's president and prime minister in various capacities since 1999, has frequently cited Ilyin as one of the key intellectual influences on his approach to governance and statecraft. Ilyin's works, which were largely forgotten during the Soviet era, have been resurrected and reinterpreted in the context of contemporary Russian politics, where they provide a philosophical foundation for many of Putin's policies and public statements.

Putin's references to Ilyin are not mere rhetorical flourishes; they reflect a deep engagement with the philosopher's ideas and an endorsement of his vision for Russia. In several speeches and writings, Putin has invoked Ilyin's thoughts on the state, law, and the moral obligations of rulers, using them to justify his administration's policies on national security, social order, and international relations. This revival of Ilyin's ideas has also been facilitated by the Russian state, which has supported the publication and dissemination of his works, making them more accessible to the Russian public and intellectuals.

Ilyin's emphasis on the importance of a strong, centralized state, his critique of Western liberalism, and his advocacy for the use of force in defense of national interests resonate strongly with Putin's vision of Russia as a great power. For Putin, Ilyin offers not just a historical perspective but a guiding philosophy that aligns with his own views on governance, sovereignty, and the role of Russia on the global stage.

Analysis of How Ilyin's Philosophy Aligns with Putin's Approach to Governance

The alignment between Ilyin's philosophy and Putin's approach to governance is particularly evident in matters of national security and foreign policy. Ilyin's belief

in the moral necessity of force, his concept of "knightly duty," and his emphasis on the preservation of social order all find echoes in Putin's policies and strategies.

National Security: Putin's approach to national security is deeply informed by Ilyin's conviction that the state must be willing and able to use force to defend itself against external and internal threats. Ilyin's idea that evil must be met with decisive action when all other means fail is reflected in Russia's military interventions, both within its borders and abroad. For example, Putin's actions in Chechnya, Georgia, Crimea, and Syria can be seen as manifestations of Ilyin's philosophy, where the use of force is justified as a necessary response to protect Russian interests and maintain stability.

Foreign Policy: On the international stage, Putin's foreign policy is marked by a rejection of Western liberalism and a strong emphasis on sovereignty and national interests—principles that are central to Ilyin's thought. Ilyin was critical of Western liberalism, viewing it as morally and spiritually bankrupt, and believed that Russia's destiny lay in preserving its unique cultural and spiritual identity against the encroachments of the West. This perspective aligns with Putin's rhetoric and actions, particularly his opposition to NATO's eastward expansion, his defense of traditional values, and his efforts to position Russia as a counterbalance to Western influence in global affairs.

Governance and Social Order: Domestically, Putin has employed Ilyin's ideas to justify a governance model that prioritizes stability, order, and the centralization of power. Ilyin's skepticism of democracy and his belief in the need for a strong, authoritarian state to safeguard the nation's moral and spiritual health resonate with Putin's political strategies, which have included the consolidation of power within the presidency, the suppression of political dissent, and the promotion of a conservative, nationalist ideology. This model of governance, which emphasizes the importance of a unified state under a strong leader, mirrors Ilyin's vision of a Russia that is guided by a moral and spiritual mission.

The Role of Ilyin's Ideas in Shaping Russia's Stance Against Western Liberalism and the Defense of Traditional Values

One of the most significant ways in which Ilyin's ideas have influenced contemporary Russian policy is in the formulation of Russia's stance against

Western liberalism and its defense of traditional values. Ilyin was a vocal critic of the Western liberal tradition, which he saw as fundamentally incompatible with Russian culture and spirituality. He argued that Western liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism, secularism, and materialism, was morally corrosive and posed a threat to the collective well-being of the Russian people.

Putin has adopted and amplified this critique, positioning Russia as a defender of traditional values in opposition to the liberal values of the West. This is evident in Russia's domestic policies, which have emphasized the importance of the Orthodox Church, the promotion of conservative social norms, and the rejection of Western cultural influences. Putin has framed Russia as a bastion of traditional morality, standing against what he perceives as the moral decay of the West. This narrative has been used to justify a range of policies, from the enactment of laws against LGBTQ+ rights to the promotion of pro-family policies and the strengthening of ties between the state and the Orthodox Church.

In the international arena, Putin has positioned Russia as a leader of the global movement against Western liberalism, aligning with other countries and movements that share similar values. This has included support for populist and nationalist movements in Europe and the United States, as well as alliances with countries that reject Western liberalism in favor of authoritarian or traditionalist governance models.

Ilyin's ideas provide the philosophical underpinning for this stance, offering a coherent intellectual framework for Russia's resistance to Western influence and its defense of what it considers to be its unique cultural and spiritual heritage. By drawing on Ilyin's critique of the West, Putin has been able to articulate a vision of Russia that is not only geopolitically independent but also morally superior to the liberal democracies of the West. This vision has resonated with many Russians, who see in Putin's policies a return to the country's traditional values and a reaffirmation of its historical mission.

In conclusion, the contemporary relevance of Ilyin's philosophy in the context of Putin's Russia cannot be overstated. Ilyin's ideas have not only shaped Putin's approach to governance, national security, and foreign policy but have also provided the ideological basis for Russia's resistance to Western liberalism and its defense of traditional values. As Russia continues to navigate its role in a rapidly

changing global landscape, Ilyin's philosophy will likely remain a key influence on the country's political trajectory and its vision of itself as a moral and spiritual power.

Responding to Western Criticisms

Addressing the Accusations of Ilyin Being Putin's Favorite Philosopher and the Implications of This Association

In Western discourse, the association between Ivan Ilyin and Vladimir Putin has often been highlighted with a tone of suspicion or outright condemnation. Critics argue that Putin's admiration for Ilyin is indicative of an authoritarian and reactionary mindset, one that is fundamentally opposed to liberal democratic values. Ilyin is frequently portrayed as a philosopher who espoused views that justify the use of force, centralized power, and the suppression of dissent—qualities that many Western observers see reflected in Putin's governance.

However, it is crucial to understand that Putin's endorsement of Ilyin does not stem from a simplistic or cynical appropriation of Ilyin's ideas. Rather, it reflects a deep engagement with Ilyin's philosophical framework, which offers a coherent and robust defense of a strong state, moral order, and the legitimate use of force in the face of evil. For Putin, Ilyin provides not just a philosophical justification for his policies but also a moral and spiritual guide for Russia's role in the world.

Western criticisms often fail to appreciate the nuances of Ilyin's thought and the historical context in which his ideas were developed. Ilyin was not merely a reactionary thinker; he was a philosopher deeply concerned with the preservation of Russian culture and the protection of his country from the chaos and destruction he witnessed during the Bolshevik Revolution and the subsequent civil war. His advocacy for a strong, centralized state was not an endorsement of tyranny, but a response to the existential threats faced by Russia during his lifetime.

Moreover, the portrayal of Ilyin as Putin's "favorite philosopher" often overlooks the broader intellectual tradition in Russia, which values strong leadership, social cohesion, and the defense of national sovereignty. Putin's reference to Ilyin should be seen as part of a larger effort to reconnect contemporary Russia with

its intellectual and spiritual heritage, rather than as an endorsement of authoritarianism per se.

Counterarguments to the Western Liberal Critique of Ilyin's Philosophy and Putin's Policies

Western liberal critiques of Ilyin's philosophy and Putin's policies often center on the perceived rejection of democratic norms, individual rights, and the rule of law. Ilyin's emphasis on the moral necessity of force and his skepticism of liberal democracy are frequently cited as evidence that his ideas are incompatible with the values of a free and open society. Similarly, Putin's policies, which prioritize state sovereignty, social order, and traditional values, are often viewed as antithetical to the principles of liberalism.

However, these critiques often rest on a misunderstanding of both Ilyin's philosophy and the nature of Russian governance. Ilyin did not reject democracy outright; rather, he questioned the viability of Western-style democracy in the context of Russian culture and history. He argued that the imposition of liberal democratic norms on Russia, without regard for its unique traditions and challenges, would lead to instability and moral decay. Ilyin believed that Russia needed a form of governance that reflected its own values and circumstances, one that prioritized the common good over individualism and maintained a strong sense of national identity.

Putin's policies can be seen as an extension of this argument. In the face of what he perceives as external and internal threats, Putin has emphasized the importance of a strong state, social cohesion, and the defense of traditional values. These policies are not necessarily a rejection of democracy, but rather a different interpretation of what democracy means in the Russian context. For Putin, and for Ilyin before him, the well-being of the state and the preservation of national identity take precedence over the liberal emphasis on individual rights and freedoms.

Furthermore, the Western liberal critique often ignores the realities of Russian history and the challenges that have shaped the country's political culture. Russia's experiences with revolution, civil war, foreign invasions, and economic hardship have fostered a deep-seated concern with stability, security, and the protection of the national community. In this context, the liberal model of

governance, with its focus on pluralism, individualism, and market-driven policies, has often seemed ill-suited to Russian needs.

Ilyin's philosophy, and by extension Putin's policies, offer an alternative vision of governance—one that is rooted in Russian history, culture, and the Orthodox Christian tradition. This vision emphasizes the moral and spiritual dimensions of statecraft, the importance of collective responsibility, and the necessity of a strong, centralized authority to maintain order and justice. To dismiss this vision as simply authoritarian is to overlook the complexities of Russian political thought and the legitimate concerns that underlie it.

The Necessity of Understanding Ilyin's Work Within the Context of Russian History and Culture

To fully appreciate the relevance of Ilyin's philosophy, it is essential to understand his work within the broader context of Russian history and culture, rather than through the lens of Western liberalism. Ilyin's ideas were shaped by the tumultuous events of early 20th-century Russia—a period marked by the collapse of the Russian Empire, the rise of Bolshevism, and the devastating civil war that followed. These experiences profoundly influenced Ilyin's views on the nature of evil, the role of the state, and the moral obligations of individuals and rulers.

In Russian culture, the concept of a strong state has long been seen as essential to the survival and prosperity of the nation. This is not merely a preference for authoritarianism, but a response to the unique challenges faced by Russia, including its vast size, diverse population, and history of external threats. The Orthodox Christian tradition, with its emphasis on communal values, spiritual authority, and the moral responsibilities of leadership, has also played a crucial role in shaping Russian political thought. Ilyin's philosophy reflects these influences, offering a vision of governance that is deeply rooted in Russian spiritual and cultural identity.

Western liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights, secularism, and market-driven policies, often fails to resonate in the Russian context, where the collective good and national sovereignty are seen as paramount. Ilyin's critique of liberalism is not simply a rejection of democracy, but a call for a form of governance that is more attuned to the moral and spiritual needs of the Russian people. His advocacy for the use of force, the centralization of power, and the defense of

traditional values must be understood in this light—as a response to the specific challenges and historical experiences of Russia.

By framing Ilyin's work within the context of Russian history and culture, it becomes clear that his ideas offer a legitimate and coherent alternative to the Western liberal model. Rather than dismissing Ilyin as a reactionary or authoritarian thinker, it is important to recognize the depth and complexity of his philosophy, which addresses the moral and spiritual dimensions of governance in a way that resonates with the Russian experience. Similarly, Putin's adoption of Ilyin's ideas should be seen as an attempt to articulate a uniquely Russian approach to statecraft, one that prioritizes the well-being of the nation and the preservation of its cultural identity.

In conclusion, the Western criticisms of Ilyin and Putin often stem from a failure to understand the historical and cultural context in which their ideas have developed. Ilyin's philosophy, far from being an endorsement of tyranny, offers a thoughtful and principled defense of a strong state, moral order, and the use of force in the face of evil. By engaging with Ilyin's work on its own terms, and within the context of Russian history, it becomes possible to appreciate the enduring relevance of his ideas and their significance for contemporary Russian policy.

The Moral and Philosophical Justification for Force

Exploration of the Ethical Dimensions of Using Force in Governance and Defense as Articulated by Ilyin

Ivan Ilyin's philosophy offers a profound exploration of the ethical dimensions involved in the use of force within the contexts of governance and defense. Central to his thought is the belief that force, while inherently fraught with moral complexity, can be justified—indeed, morally necessary—under certain conditions. Ilyin does not approach the concept of force as a simple tool of power but rather as a deeply ethical action that must be carefully weighed and guided by moral principles.

For Ilyin, the ethical justification for force begins with the recognition of evil as an active and destructive force in the world. Unlike the pacifist perspective, which tends to view all violence as inherently wrong, Ilyin argues that the refusal to

confront evil with appropriate measures can itself be a moral failure. In his view, there are circumstances in which the use of force is required to protect the innocent, defend justice, and maintain social order. This use of force must be governed by a strict ethical framework that distinguishes between just and unjust applications of power.

Ilyin's ethical framework for force is rooted in the concept of proportionality and necessity. He asserts that force should only be used when it is proportionate to the threat posed and when it is the only viable means of achieving a just outcome. This ensures that the use of force is not driven by vengeance, cruelty, or the desire for domination but by the imperative to protect and preserve the common good. Ilyin emphasizes that those who wield force must do so with a clear conscience, guided by a deep sense of moral responsibility and accountability.

Moreover, Ilyin insists on the importance of intention in the ethical use of force. The motivation behind the use of force must be pure, aimed at upholding justice and protecting the vulnerable, rather than advancing personal or political interests. This intention must be coupled with a profound awareness of the potential consequences of force, including the harm that it may cause. Ilyin acknowledges that the use of force often entails difficult choices and moral dilemmas, but he argues that these challenges do not negate the necessity of action when faced with evil.

Discussion on the Importance of Maintaining Order, Security, and Sovereignty in the Face of External and Internal Threats

A key element of Ilyin's justification for the use of force lies in his emphasis on the importance of maintaining order, security, and sovereignty. For Ilyin, these are not merely political goals but moral imperatives that are essential to the well-being of the state and its citizens. In a world where evil exists and actively seeks to disrupt society, the preservation of order and security becomes a fundamental duty of the state.

Ilyin's philosophy is deeply concerned with the threats that can arise both from within and outside the state. Internally, the state must be vigilant against forces that seek to undermine social cohesion, spread chaos, or challenge the legitimate authority of the government. These internal threats can take many forms,

including political unrest, criminal activity, and ideological subversion. Ilyin argues that the state has not only the right but the obligation to use force when necessary to protect its citizens and maintain the rule of law.

Externally, Ilyin recognizes the reality of geopolitical threats—hostile powers, invasions, and other forms of aggression—that can endanger the sovereignty and survival of the state. In the face of such threats, the use of force is justified as a means of defending the nation's independence and protecting its people from harm. Ilyin's emphasis on sovereignty reflects his belief that the state has a sacred duty to preserve its autonomy and integrity against any forces that would seek to subjugate or destabilize it.

The preservation of order, security, and sovereignty is not only a matter of practical governance but also a moral duty. Ilyin contends that without these fundamental elements, society would descend into anarchy and moral decay, leaving individuals vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Therefore, the use of force, when applied judiciously and ethically, is an essential tool for upholding the moral and social fabric of the state. It is through the maintenance of order and security that the state fulfills its role as the protector of its people and the guarantor of justice.

The Philosophical Underpinnings That Support the Use of Force as a Legitimate and Necessary Tool in Statecraft

The philosophical underpinnings of Ilyin's justification for force are deeply rooted in his understanding of the state as a moral and spiritual entity. For Ilyin, the state is not merely a political organization but a manifestation of the collective will and moral order of the people. It is through the state that justice is administered, social order is maintained, and the common good is pursued. As such, the state has a moral obligation to protect its citizens and uphold justice, even if that requires the use of force.

One of the key philosophical concepts that support Ilyin's justification for force is the idea of the "knightly duty" of the state. This concept, derived from the medieval tradition of chivalry, emphasizes the role of the state as a defender of the weak, a protector of justice, and a force for good in the world. Just as the knight was bound by a code of honor to defend the innocent and combat evil, so

too is the state bound by a moral duty to use its power to protect its citizens and maintain order.

Ilyin also draws upon the Orthodox Christian tradition, which recognizes the necessity of force in certain circumstances to combat evil and preserve the moral order. In this tradition, the use of force is not seen as inherently sinful but as a potential means of fulfilling a higher moral purpose. This view is reflected in the concept of "Just War," which holds that war and violence can be morally justified when they are waged to protect the innocent, defend the faith, or restore justice.

The philosophical justification for force in Ilyin's thought is also informed by his understanding of the nature of evil. Ilyin views evil as an active and malignant force that seeks to destroy what is good and just in the world. This understanding of evil necessitates a response that is equally active and decisive. For Ilyin, the state must not be passive in the face of evil but must take proactive measures to confront and defeat it. This may involve the use of force, but it is a force that is wielded with moral purpose and guided by ethical principles.

Furthermore, Ilyin's philosophy emphasizes the importance of the common good as a guiding principle in statecraft. The use of force is justified when it serves the greater good of society—when it protects the lives and well-being of citizens, preserves the social order, and upholds justice. In this sense, force is not an end in itself but a means to achieve a higher moral objective. The legitimacy of force, therefore, is contingent upon its alignment with the moral duties of the state and its contribution to the common good.

In conclusion, Ilyin's moral and philosophical justification for the use of force is a complex and nuanced framework that integrates ethical considerations, the preservation of order and sovereignty, and the philosophical principles of statecraft. Force, in Ilyin's view, is not a tool to be used lightly but a necessary and morally grounded response to the presence of evil and the threats that endanger society. By maintaining a careful balance between moral duty and practical necessity, Ilyin offers a compelling argument for the legitimate and ethical use of force in the service of justice and the common good.

Conclusion

Recapitulation of Ilyin's Central Thesis and Its Relevance to Contemporary Russian Politics

Ivan Ilyin's central thesis, as articulated in his work *On Resistance to Evil by Force*, revolves around the moral imperative to confront and, when necessary, combat evil through the use of force. Ilyin argues that in a world where malevolent forces actively seek to disrupt order, harm the innocent, and undermine the moral fabric of society, the use of force becomes not only a practical necessity but a moral duty. This perspective is deeply rooted in Ilyin's understanding of the state as a guardian of justice, social order, and national sovereignty.

In the context of contemporary Russian politics, Ilyin's philosophy has found renewed relevance, particularly under the leadership of Vladimir Putin. Putin's governance, characterized by a strong emphasis on state sovereignty, national security, and the defense of traditional values, reflects many of the principles espoused by Ilyin. The alignment between Ilyin's ideas and Putin's policies is evident in Russia's assertive stance on the global stage, its focus on maintaining internal stability, and its resistance to the encroachment of Western liberalism.

Ilyin's thesis provides a philosophical foundation for understanding Russia's approach to governance and international relations, particularly in a world that Russia perceives as increasingly hostile to its interests and values. By advocating for the legitimate and ethical use of force in defense of the nation, Ilyin's philosophy offers a coherent justification for the actions taken by the Russian state to protect its sovereignty and uphold its moral and cultural identity.

Final Thoughts on the Enduring Significance of Ilyin's Philosophy for Understanding the Moral Imperatives of Governance and the Justified Use of Force

The enduring significance of Ivan Ilyin's philosophy lies in its ability to address the complex moral imperatives of governance, particularly in times of crisis and conflict. Ilyin's work challenges the simplistic dichotomy between violence and nonviolence, offering a more nuanced understanding of the role that force can play in the pursuit of justice and the protection of society. His emphasis on the ethical dimensions of force—its necessity, proportionality, and moral intent—

provides a framework for ensuring that the use of power remains aligned with the higher principles of justice and the common good.

Ilyin's philosophy also underscores the importance of moral courage in leadership. His concept of "knightly duty" calls on those in positions of authority to confront evil without hesitation, bearing the heavy moral burden that such actions entail. This vision of leadership, which prioritizes the protection of the community over individual interests, resonates strongly in a world where the challenges to social order and national security are increasingly complex and multifaceted.

In the context of Russian governance, Ilyin's ideas continue to inform the state's approach to both internal and external threats. His emphasis on the centralization of power, the preservation of cultural and spiritual identity, and the moral obligation to use force when necessary, all contribute to a vision of the state as a moral and protective force. This vision has not only shaped Russia's domestic policies but has also influenced its stance in global geopolitics, where the defense of sovereignty and traditional values often takes precedence over the adoption of Western liberal norms.

The Broader Implications of Adopting Ilyin's Views in the Context of Global Geopolitics and the Preservation of National Identity

The adoption of Ilyin's views in the context of global geopolitics has far-reaching implications, particularly for the preservation of national identity in an increasingly interconnected world. Ilyin's philosophy advocates for a strong, independent state that is capable of defending its sovereignty and cultural heritage against external pressures. In a global environment where the forces of globalization, liberalism, and cultural homogenization are often perceived as threats to national distinctiveness, Ilyin's emphasis on the moral duty of the state to protect its identity and values becomes particularly salient.

For countries like Russia, Ilyin's ideas offer a blueprint for navigating the challenges of global geopolitics while maintaining a firm commitment to national sovereignty and cultural preservation. This approach involves a careful balance between engaging with the international community and defending against the encroachment of values and systems that are seen as incompatible with the nation's traditions and moral foundations. Ilyin's philosophy thus supports a form

of statecraft that prioritizes the protection of national interests, the maintenance of social order, and the assertion of moral authority on the global stage.

Furthermore, Ilyin's views have broader implications for the global discourse on governance and the role of the state. His critique of Western liberalism, with its emphasis on individualism and secularism, challenges the dominance of these ideas in global politics. By advocating for a model of governance that is rooted in moral and spiritual values, Ilyin's philosophy offers an alternative to the liberal democratic framework that has often been promoted as the universal standard. This alternative model, which emphasizes collective responsibility, the centralization of power, and the moral justification for force, provides a counterpoint to the liberal emphasis on pluralism, individual rights, and market-driven policies.

In conclusion, Ivan Ilyin's philosophy continues to offer valuable insights into the moral and philosophical underpinnings of governance and statecraft. His defense of the use of force, when ethically justified, remains relevant in addressing the challenges of contemporary geopolitics and the preservation of national identity. As nations navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, Ilyin's ideas provide a compelling framework for understanding the moral imperatives of leadership and the legitimate use of power in the service of justice, security, and the common good.

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